

a¹ the first sterile region and by retracting the portion of the valve from the first sterile region back into the continuously sterilized second sterile region.

16. (Amended) A method comprising the steps of:

controlling a flow of product using a valve;

surrounding a region where the product exits the valve with a sterile region;

a² providing a continuously sterilized second sterile region positioned proximate said first sterile region whereby said second sterile region is continuously sterilized during operation; and

controlling the opening or closing of the valve by extending a portion of the valve from the continuously sterilized second sterile region into the first sterile region and by retracting the portion of the valve from the first sterile region back into the continuously sterilized second sterile region.

22. (New) A method comprising the steps of:

controlling a flow of product using a valve;

a³ surrounding a region where the product exits the valve with a sterile region;

providing a second sterile region positioned proximate said first sterile region;

controlling the opening or closing of the valve by extending a portion of the valve from the second sterile region into the first sterile region and by retracting the portion of the valve from the first sterile region back into the second sterile region;

providing a tank for containing a supply of pressurized product flowing to the valve;

providing a measuring device for measuring the amount of pressurized product flowing from the tank to the valve;

exposing the valve, an interior surface of the tank, and an interior surface of the measuring device with steam;

covering an exit of the valve; and

allowing a build-up of steam pressure inside the tank to above a temperature of about 250°F, a steam pressure of about 50 psig, for about 30 minutes.

23. (New) A method comprising the steps of:

controlling a flow of product using a valve;

surrounding a region where the product exits the valve with a sterile region;

providing a second sterile region positioned proximate said first sterile region;

controlling the opening or closing of the valve by extending a portion of the valve from the second sterile region

into the first sterile region and by retracting the portion of the valve from the first sterile region back into the second sterile region;

providing a second apparatus wherein the container is filled to a first level with the product exiting from the first apparatus, and the container is filled to a second level with the product exiting from the second apparatus;

uncovering the exit of the valve; and

providing sterile air to reduce the temperature of the valve, the interior surface of the tank, and the interior surface of the measuring device to the temperature of the product.

24. (New) Apparatus comprising:

an inline bottle filing apparatus including:

a valve for controlling a flow of product;

a first sterile region surrounding a region where the product exits the valve;

a second sterile region positioned proximate said first sterile region;

a valve activation mechanism for controlling the opening or closing of the valve by extending a portion of the valve from the second sterile region into the first sterile region and by retracting the portion of the valve from the first sterile region back into the second sterile region.

25. (New) The apparatus of claim 24, further comprising a sterile tunnel.

26. (New) Apparatus comprising:

a valve for controlling a flow of product into a bottle;

a first sterile region surrounding a region where the product exits the valve;

a second sterile region positioned proximate said first sterile region;

93 a valve activation mechanism for controlling the opening or closing of the valve by extending a portion of the valve from the second sterile region into the first sterile region, such that the valve does not contact the bottle, and by retracting the portion of the valve from the first sterile region back into the second sterile region.

27. (New) The apparatus of claim 26, further comprising a sterile tunnel.

28. (New) The apparatus of claim 27, wherein the valve mechanism fills the bottle such that the atmospheric pressure of the interior of the bottle is the same atmospheric pressure of the sterile tunnel.